The Path of Our Sorrow

Miss Freeland said,
“During the Great War we fed the world.
We couldn’t grow enough wheat
to fill all the bellies.
The price the world paid for our wheat
was so high
it swelled our wallets
and our heads,
and we bought bigger tractors,
more acres,
until we had mortgages
and rent
and bills
beyond reason,
but we all felt so useful, we didn’t notice.
Then the war ended and before long,
Europe didn’t need our wheat anymore,
they could grow their own.
But we needed Europe's money
to pay our mortgage,
our rent,
our bills.
We squeezed more cattle,
more sheep,
on to less land,
and they grazed down the stubble
till they reached root.
And the price of wheat kept dropping
so we had to grow more bushels
to make the same amount of money we
made before,
to pay for all that equipment, all that land,
and the more sod we plowed up,
the drier things got,
because the water that used to collect
there
under the grass,
biding its time,
keeping things alive through the dry spells
wasn’t there anymore.
Without the sod the water vanished,
the soil turned to dust.

Until the wind took it,
lifting it up and carrying it away.
Such a sorrow doesn’t come suddenly,
there are a thousand steps to take before
you get there.”

But now,
sorrow climbs up our front steps,
big as Texas, and we didn’t even see it coming,
even though it’d been making its way straight for us all along.

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Excerpt from *Out of the Dust*, Karen Hesse